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SUBJECT: GOG DEMANDS MORE DONOR SUPPORT FOR ELECTIONS

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. A meeting between the GoG and the international community on elections quickly deteriorated into a heated inter-agency debate about elections funding, with harsh criticism aimed at the absent Minister of Finance.

The Minister of Territorial Administration and Political Affairs dominated the meeting, frequently cutting off other ministers, GoG officials, and diplomats in order to continue his oratory. He assured the diplomatic community of the GoG's political will to hold elections, essentially arguing that the only thing holding him back from doing his job is cash on hand. The GoG requested international donor assistance to cover the \$8.5 million budgetary gap for elections. Although the meeting was chaotic, developments earlier this week suggest that the GoG is making some progress towards elections. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) The Minister of Territorial Administration and Political Affairs (MATAP) called an elections steering committee meeting with the international donor community at the last minute on October 10. In addition to the MATAP minister, the ministers of Economic control, Justice, and Guineans Abroad, also participated in the discussion, which lasted for nearly three hours. A senior representative from the Ministry of Finance was present, as were more than a dozen other GoG officials. The National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) sent a representative, but the CENI president, Ben Sekou Syllah, was not present. The diplomatic community was represented by the UN Resident Representative, the EU Ambassador, the Special ECOWAS Representative, and the assistance coordinator at the French Embassy. A/DCM and USAID Technical Office Chief attended on behalf of the USG.

¶3. (SBU) Although the meeting was ostensibly called to discuss progress towards elections, it quickly became clear that the MATAP minister wanted to use the meeting as a platform to air internal GoG budgetary conflicts before the international community. He started the meeting with a vague agenda, but then almost completely ignored the stated agenda for the duration of the meeting, despite attempts by his ministerial colleagues to get things back on track.

¶4. (SBU) In his opening remarks, the MATAP Minister assured the international community that the GoG is absolutely committed to elections. &You have no need to doubt our political will;8 he said, &it exists at every level, including the president and the prime minister.8 According to the minister, the GoG's main stumbling block is elections financing, but emphasized that this problem would not deter the GoG from organizing elections. &You will be convinced of our willingness to do this, and we will work together to hold elections,8 he promised.

¶5. (SBU) Referring to the elections budget that had been distributed before the meeting, the EU Ambassador said that there was nothing new in the budget. She emphasized that the GoG needs to develop a new elections timeline that details

all of the necessary steps and projects target completion dates. The Finance representative later echoed the same concern, as did several other participants. However, the MATAP minister repeatedly claimed that the GoG is currently working on the timeline, but that funding continues to be the most critical issue.

¶16. (SBU) The MATAP minister said that the GoG needs foreign assistance, but needs to have it &freely,8 so that his ministry can function effectively. &You always say that you are going to help us, but you are only helping us with the second stage; we need to take care of the first stage before we get to the second stage,8 he said. The UN Resident Representative responded by saying that the various stages of elections preparations are not mutually exclusive, and that activities from both stages can be completed simultaneously. &If you go stage by stage, you are never going to get there,8 she said.

¶17. (SBU) From there, the meeting quickly deteriorated into a heated 90-minute long inter-ministerial debate about funding, with occasional digs aimed at the international community. The MATAP minister dominated the discussion, often using expansive arm gestures and a raised voice. He frequently silenced his ministerial colleagues, as well as the Finance representative, refusing to let them speak. On at least three occasions, seeing that members of the diplomatic community were quietly whispering to each other behind their hands, the minister called their names and asked them to pay attention to the discussion.

¶18. (SBU) At one point, the minister said &that everyone has
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a responsibility for these elections, including the international community, and all the funding needs to be put at MATAP,s and the CENI,s disposal immediately, not in small bits here and there, but everything at once.8 He then added &we will do our part so that the money goes where it is supposed to go.8

¶19. (SBU) The Minister of Economic Control tried to get a word in several times, and then was finally passed the microphone. He apologized that he had not received any information prior to the meeting, and was therefore not well prepared. However, he said that the most urgent need is for the GoG and the international community to address the budgetary gap of \$8.5 million. &If we do not address the gap, the rest of this discussion is useless,8 he said.

¶10. (SBU) The senior Finance representative agreed that the budget gap is a critical question. Responding to criticisms from the Minister of MATAP on Finance,s failure to release budgeted elections funds, the representative said that Finance needs to see an elections timeline. This comment seemed only to exacerbate frustrations as the MATAP minister launched into a critical oratory aimed at the absent Minister of Finance. He said that the 2008 national budget, which was approved by the National Assembly and the president, clearly details how much money the GoG intends to spend on elections. &There should be no conditions; the money belongs to MATAP,8 he said, adding that &another minister has no right to question what the money is being used for when it is clearly detailed in the budget.8 The other ministers quickly voiced their support for the MATAP minister,s comment. The Minister of Justice added &the Ministry of Finance is not a state within itself.8

¶11. (SBU) The MATAP minister then proceeded to read a letter he had sent to the prime minister that week asking for the PM,s help in getting the funds released, which was followed by reading the PM,s response directing the Minister of Finance to turn over the funds to MATAP.

¶12. (SBU) When able to get a word in edgewise, the French representative said that it would be difficult to get

additional assistance from France if key steps are not successfully undertaken, mentioning voter registration specifically. Later, the UN Representative emphasized the importance of a consistent budget with concrete activities planned and then completed. She also commented that there is a question of priorities since the GoG recently spent significant funds on the country's 50th anniversary celebration, but that additional funds for elections have yet to materialize.

¶13. (SBU) The Minister of Economic Control later said that he agreed that the release of funds is important, especially since the funds had already been allocated, but that there also needs to be some plan for spending the funds responsibly.

¶14. (SBU) The CENI representative was largely silent for the duration of the meeting until the MATAP minister finally invited him to speak towards the end of the meeting. He had little to say other than to agree that funding was a priority, noting that we cannot continue to work like this.⁸ According to the CENI representative, it was a shame that the prime minister and the minister of finance were not present at the meeting. The MATAP minister told the CENI to write a letter detailing its financial needs and then offered to intercede with the PM to get the funds released.

COMMENT

¶15. (SBU) The meeting had most of the gathered diplomats exchanging questioning glances among themselves, and figuratively scratching their heads. The MATAP minister essentially refused to talk about anything other than the budget, despite there having been several important issues to address. Although he criticized the international community while demanding more support, he appeared more interested in using the meeting as a platform to bash the Minister of Finance, and to dramatically illustrate that the lack of funds is the only thing holding him back from doing his job. Despite the chaotic nature of the meeting and the apparent frustration of the donor community, the GoG has already taken concrete steps this week to move elections forward. During an elections focal group meeting on October 15, the GoG reported that the Ministry of Finance had released budgeted funds to MATAP. In addition, the voter registration campaign

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was launched in Boke and Fria over the weekend. END COMMENT.
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